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# OBSERVATIONS ON *LEPUS CALLOTIS* IN NEW MEXICO

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The occurrence of *Lepus callotis gaillardi* Mearns in the United States has been unclear since the original description (Mearns 1896:560). During the resurvey of the Mexican-United States boundary in 1892 and 1893, E. A. Mearns and F. X. Holzner obtained six of these unique jack rabbits. The skin labels on three specimens taken 16 and 29 June 1892, state the animals were taken on the "Mexican Boundary Line, near White Water, Chihuahua." Two others, including the type of *L. gaillardi*, taken on 17 June 1892, read "near White Water, Chihuahua, on the Mex. Bound. Line." The skull tags of these five specimens read variously: "Plyas (sic) Valley, near White Water, Chihuahua, Mex.; West fork of Plyas (sic) Valley, near White Water, Chihuahua, Mexico; Mex. Bound. Line; Plyas (sic) Valley near White Water, Chihuahua." The holotype (USNM 20525/35714, skin and skull) also possesses red type labels, presumably added at the time of description, stating: "Playas Valley, near Mon. No. 63, Mex. Bound. Line." The original description (Mearns 1896:562) gives the type-locality as: "west fork of the Playas Valley near monument No. 63, Mexican boundary line." The remaining specimen, taken 15 September 1893, came from "Plyas (sic) Valley, Mex. Bd. Line" according to the skin tag, or "East Fork of Plyas (sic) Valley" according to the skull label. The skin tag of this specimen also bears the notation "Topotype."

All six of the above specimens were taken while the Boundary Commission was encamped at White Water, 1 mi S Monument No. 61. During the first visit there (13–29 June

1892) Mearns explored the east and west Playas Valleys (Mearns 1907:11), traveled south to San Francisco Canyon (5 mi SW Monument No. 63), and explored the San Luis Mountains in this area (Mearns 1907:12). Mearns' original "Field Catalog" (files of USNM) for this first visit gives "Whitewater, Chihuahua, Mexico" as the locality for specimens taken 16–17 June 1892, and "Mexican boundary line, near Whitewater" as the locality for the 29 June 1892 specimen. We can find no original Field Catalog listing the specimen taken in September 1893.

During his travels with the Boundary Commission, Mearns was in the company of competent surveyors. The main missions of the party were to resurvey the border and erect new monuments. It thus seems likely that he would have been cognizant of the actual provenance of these specimens. Had the animals been taken in New Mexico, we presume he would have labeled them as from Grant County (now Hidalgo County), New Mexico, as he did with other specimens taken before and after his stay at Whitewater. Although no definite answer as to the exact locality of these animals can be given now, our conclusion is that all the animals came from the Mexican side of the boundary.

The plethora of localities for these jack rabbits has resulted in considerable confusion by later workers. Lyon and Osgood (1909:28), apparently relying on the type description (Mearns 1896:562), gave the type-locality as "West fork of the Playas Valley, near Monument No. 63, Mexican boundary line." Bailey (1932:53) ascribed the holotype to the "Mexican boundline, near Monument 63, west arm of Playas Valley, southwestern New Mexico." Furthermore, he stated (Bailey 1932) that "besides the type-specimen that he (Mearns) collected, he secured a series of five from White Water just below the international boundary line."

Bailey (1932) also reported, on the basis of field work in New Mexico, that "ranchmen in 1908 reported white-sided jack rabbits, which they called antelope rabbits" in the southern end of both the Playas and Animas Valleys. E. A. Goldman (files of Biological Survey 1908) also reported having seen this species in these areas, although no specimens were known from the Animas Valley.

Poole and Schantz (1942:211), in their catalog of type-specimens, added to the confusion by giving the type-locality for *L. gaillardi* as: "West fork of the Playas Valley, near Monument No. 63, Mexican boundary line, Grant County, N. Mex." Hall (1951:188) listed all localities known to him for *L. gaillardi*, including Poole and Schantz's Grant County "record" and Bailey's reported sight records for the Animas Valley. The map drawn from these localities artifically extended the range of this species far into New Mexico because present day Grant County is well to the north of the Mexican boundary; the County having since been divided to form Luna and Hidalgo Counties. Hall and Kelson (1959:286) gave the type-locality as in Hidalgo County, although their map (p. 288) does not reflect this change.

Anderson and Gaunt (1962) and Anderson (1972) did much to correct the confusion regarding Mearns' localities, and Anderson and Gaunt (1962:8) also recorded two specimens taken in the "south end of west side of Playas Valley, 4600 feet" on 6 September 1931, and housed in the Museum of Vertebrate Zoology, University of California, Berkeley. These two specimens appear to be the only unquestioned records from New Mexico, and are reported as such by Findley et al. (1975). Anderson and Gaunt (1962), however, allocate the type and the 1893 specimen to New Mexico, an allocation that seems erroneous to us.

Regardless of the actual provenance of these early specimens, *L. callotis gaillardi* must be regarded as an extremely rare mammal in this area of New Mexico and Chihuahua, and the recent acquisition of a specimen seems noteworthy in this respect. We obtained an adult female *L. callotis* about 0.5 km N Cloverdale, Hidalgo County, New Mexico (labeled "Cloverdale"), on 19 July 1974. The animal, the first taken in 43 years in New Mexico, also substantiates the 1908 reports of this species in the Animas Valley.

Our specimen (USNM 506267) was lactating and also contained two embryos measuring 9 mm (crown-rump). Of the five females taken by Mearns and Holzner, one was noted to contain "three small fetuses."

Anderson (1972) has noted the tendency for these hares to occur in pairs, an observation also made by E. A. Goldman and V. Bailey (reports in files of Biological Survey). Our own observations confirm this, and during our field work around Cloverdale on 18 and 19 July 1974, we saw at least two and perhaps as many as four pairs. On 20 July we returned to this area and made an intensive search for *L. callotis*, but found none.

The jack rabbits, resting within 5 m of one another, flushed in front of us at distances from 5 to 25 m and ran swiftly together for distances up to 0.5 km. Their nests, which concealed them perfectly, consisted of bare oval patches (approximately 30 cm long) in clumps of tabosa grass (*Hilaria mutica*). All jack rabbits seen by us were flushed within stands of this grass, which occurred in large patches in this part of the Animas Valley. Once seen (as a jack rabbit vacated it), the nests were easy to spot; one such nest contained a partially chewed flower of *Cirsium* sp. The stomach of our specimen contained finely-chewed green plant material.

Our own observations agree closely with those made by Vernon Bailey in Chihuahua in 1932 and contained in unpublished files of the Biological Survey:

"My greatest thrill of the trip was the first view of this wonderful rabbit in life, and my first specimen collected. Riding across a high grassy mesa, about 10 miles southwest of Ramos, at 5,500 feet in (the) Upper Sonoran Zone on October 30, two of these rabbits jumped out of the brown grass just in front of my horse, and after running a few rods, squatted in the grass which matched their color exactly. The curly buffy brown hair of the backs was all that could be seen except the eyes of the nearest one which I quickly auxed from the saddle. The other, a little farther off, I tried to stalk on foot but did not get near enough for the shotgun and missed it with the rifle as it sped over the smooth prairie with white sides glistening and great ears erect, as striking a mark as an antelope, and almost as swift.

"They are said to be common on these high prairie mesas and always two together. The local name is *Snow Sides*. The specimen was an adult male, perfectly healthy and as fat as a rabbit ever gets. Well stewed it was delicious meat and made two meals for four of us. Its stomach contained tender grasses and other prairie plants of this high prairie flora."

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